

**Ernest L. Bishop
Veteran**

**Wayne Clark & Mike Russert
Interviewers**

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Chanticleer Motel
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Ernest L. Bishop: **ELB**
Wayne Clark/Mike Russert: **Q**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

ELB: Ernest L. Bishop, Bradford, Pennsylvania, 7-12-44.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

ELB: High school. That was just about it.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

ELB: I enlisted.

Q: Why did you decide to enlist?

ELB: I decided to enlist because at that point in time -- I graduated high school in 1962 -- you would go to a place to apply for a job and they would ask you if you had been in the service, and I said "No," and they says, "OK, we'll take your information and we're going to throw it in the garbage." [Laughs] And it become very obvious it was a dead end street as far as a decent job goes, and I said I'll just get this out of the way, because virtually everybody I knew eventually ended up where they enlisted or was drafted.

Q: Why did you select the Army?

ELB: I grew up always interested in guns. They promised me I'd go to Small Arms Repair School. That was why I picked the Army.

Q: Where did you go for Basic?

ELB: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Q: Could you tell us about your Basic there? Anything stands out more than another?

ELB: I don't know that anything stands out especially. Hot. I can remember that, going in in August. Most of the drill instructors at that time were Korean War veterans. I thought a pretty competent bunch of people. I got to know quite a few people. I know I met two fellows that was in my platoon that were from ... can't think of the town right now by Fort Jackson. They were from there. They were National Guard that was going doing their six months. I went home with them a couple weekends. I enjoyed that. Other than that, it wasn't too bad. Physically, I know a lot of people talk about it. I had worked,

just spent a year working in the oil fields. I was in pretty good shape. That part didn't particularly bother me.

Q: How about being away from home?

ELB: No. I've always been sort of an independent thing. That didn't bother me. One of the things I threw into it, like I said before, I was interested in guns and I used to do a lot of shooting, and I enjoyed that part of it. I enjoyed the range and qualification and that type of thing.

Q: How long were you there?

ELB: I think eight weeks. If I remember right, I think that's what Basic was at the time.

Q: And where did you go from there?

ELB: From there, I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds. That was the Ordnance Center at the time. I went to Small Arms School there. Went by bus, I remember. That was a little disappointing. It was very routine, I guess. I really didn't learn a lot, to be honest with you. I knew quite a bit about guns and things, and this was pretty much a tear-'em-apart, put-'em-together type of thing. The one thing I enjoyed, I know, the first week or so we went to a basic tool class and we got to do hands-on. I know we made an anvil by hand, a little brass anvil, file it out and everything. To this day, I have that. That part, I enjoyed, but the rest, it was boring, to be completely honest with you. You know, I obviously learned some things

Q: Now you said in the things you wrote that you were there when Kennedy was assassinated?

ELB: Oh, yeah, I was. I was in school. I can remember them breaking into our class and telling us that the President had been assassinated. And I can remember they locked the post down. We went on full alert, and it seemed so ironic. We had no gear there. I mean, we went to school. I don't know why they were on alert and what we were going to do, but they did it. And we were that way for two or three days, and I can remember being in the orderly room there, or the rec area or whatever we had, when Ruby got killed. I can remember sitting there with a bunch of people and seeing that. Other than that there, obviously that was the big thing, and I remember we went down to Arlington before he was moved to a permanent tomb. He was there, and we saw the flame and all that stuff. This was very ... This was a week or two, I don't remember exactly when, after he was taken there. But that was the big event when we were there, yeah. I'm glad you brought that up.

Q: How long were you in Aberdeen?

ELB: I think it was twelve weeks, maybe. Something like that. I don't remember exactly now. I know I went home for Christmas leave while I was there. I didn't get a leave after Basic, but I did go home Christmas leave, and I went back to school. Seemingly, we may have had a couple of weeks left, something like that, before we left there and shipped out to our units.

Q: How do you think it prepared you for what you did?

ELB: I would say pretty well. Again, when I got to the unit and I did what I did, you know, I knew what I was doing. Again, you got to bear in mind I was a person who was interested and willing to learn, and a lot of people, especially the draftees, weren't

particularly interested, so I think I come out maybe as a little better soldier, a little better at what I did than them, but I don't think I really was. I think it's just because maybe I had a little better attitude or a little better aptitude for that than some of those did. But, yeah, I think they did a good job. I don't know what else they could really do.

Q: What was your assignment when you left there?

ELB: Well, when I left there I went to 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii, Schofield Barracks. I went from Aberdeen, we flew to Los Angeles to San Francisco, and I was there at Oakland Army Terminal for a couple of weeks, which was just a miserable place to be. If anyone was there, everybody was transient. The food was bad. Everything was bad there. Then I went by ship to Hawaii. And when I got there, they didn't have a slot in the Ordnance Battalion for me, so I was a ... No, actually, I went to my Ordnance Battalion but they didn't have a job for me, so I was attached to a supply outfit and worked on a big warehouse type thing for, I would say, a month or so, and as I said in the thing I wrote, one of the interesting things that happened there was I was called as a witness for a courts martial. It was one of the guys in this warehouse had stolen some grenades and sold them downtown. I didn't know anything about it. They just called us, everybody at work there, and said, "Do you know anything, did such-and-such do this?" and I said, "No I didn't" and you were dismissed, but it was kind of interesting.

Q: You said you never found out the... ?

ELB: I never found out. That was always the fascinating thing with me with the service was that things like that would happen and you never, ever found out the outcome. Just like everybody disappeared and whatever happened, happened, but I have no idea, no idea what happened.

Q: How long were you in Hawaii?

ELB: I got there, I think, February of '64 – January, February, something like that. Basically, two years. I went ... I was TDY from there a couple of times. I went to Thailand for, I think, four months. I had one-on-one training exercises. Exercise to Formosa.

Q: What did you do on those, on the training exercises?

ELB: Just went with an infantry outfit and supported them. Just, you know, not much really, just sit around in an ordnance van and waited for something to break, you know. Well, not, not ... That was Formosa. Thailand, I went over there as an inspector. One of the things we did in addition to repair, we were an inspection team. The Army at that time had two inspection teams: the CMMI and I can't remember the other one. And one of them was civilian inspectors and one was military. We were the military and you were going to inspect the equipment. We went over there to inspect things that they were giving to the Thai government -- old surplus World War 2 stuff, which at that point in time wasn't that old. We inspected it and we stayed there. We were qualified, so we repaired a lot of it over the time. Formosa, that was just a straight training exercise.

Q: Did you get much time off?

ELB: Yeah, we got to do some stuff there, you know, the normal GI stuff that everybody does. Probably the less said the better, but that type of thing. Also, one thing I really enjoyed in Hawaii is I like to hunt and we got ... of course, we were on Oahu, which is the island where most of the things are going on ... but the Army had a big training area

on the island of Hawaii itself, the Big Island. And I volunteered to go there anytime I could because I could hunt while I was there. I got to know ... there was a guy there. I was always very envious of him, because he was the only person I ever knew of that his military MOS ... he was a game warden. He was the post game warden. He was an E-6. He had a couple bird dogs and a shot gun and he hunted. I don't know how he got the job, but I would have traded places with him. I like it over there. I hunted quite a bit. And, I don't know, I probably made three or four, maybe more than time, times that I went over. When I first went to Hawaii, I was in B Company, which we were attached to a particular brigade. Then I went ... I got transferred to a Headquarters Company, and you were attached to the Division as a whole and we would go out when any unit went out and they would break you up into smaller groups, so I got to go out quite a bit that way. You never knew who. When you were sending a group out to train, they would ask for people, and like I say, I'd volunteer. And most of the guys didn't like it over there. You were at a high elevation. You didn't get to town and everything. And that didn't bother me. I mean, I kind of liked that part of it.

Q: Now when you went out, your job was to repair weapons. What did you carry with you to do that?

ELB: We had an ordnance van. I had an ordnance van that was basically a hard-backed deuce-and-a-half, instead of canvas. It was the same size as that. We had carried quite a few spare parts in it for ... like I say, I was small arms. We had machine gun parts, rifle parts, bayonet parts (we worked on bayonets), handguns, mortars ... I think up to four-deuce mortars we worked on. Bigger than that was artillery, but we had a basic parts van. We had work benches in there, drill press, grinders, you know, that type of thing. Tool boxes. And we would set up and they would usually bring stuff to us that needed repair. Also, I got to diversify a lot. Like I say, I was in small arms but we ... I was in what we call the armament platoon and we did weapons, and they had mechanical groups that worked on them, and then we had F & E, fuel and electrical stuff. If those guys got busy and we didn't, we would help them. You know, you work on trucks and all that type of thing. The more mundane things that they had to do, we'd help them with that. It was a good environment, you know, it was a good work environment.

Q: Now, at that time, I guess talk about the M-14, M-16, and some of the problems with them.

ELB: We had ... Yeah, I was issued the M-14. That's what I took Basic Training with. To this day, I think it's a better weapon than the M-16. I never really ... I saw some M-16's. We never really had any. In fact, when I ... and after I got to Vietnam, as I was leaving ... Of course, we were in an ordnance group, so we were the last to get issued stuff. We were issued ... We were just starting to get the M-16's. We still had M-14's. We were getting the M-16's in for repair. Did not have much training on that at all. Some, but not much, and ... but basically, we were just a parts van, so we could tear it apart and if something was broken just substitute a new part. I personally liked the M-14 better

Q: Why?

ELB: I dislike anything with a lot of plastic on it. And at that time, if you look back at the history of the M-16's, they had a lot of trouble with them. Really, with dirt and things, and I think that was all cleaned up later on.

Q: Did you have any M-14 problems like that with a lot of dirt?

ELB: No, they were pretty good. The biggest problem I can remember with the M-14's is they had a real thin section back of the receiver and the stock. Some of them cracked there, and they would crack up underneath, on the fore end they would crack. Then we repaired those. I can't think of anything else ... One of the biggest headaches we had at that point in time in Hawaii was we were training shotgunners for Vietnam. They were sending them over there at that time. This would be '64-'65 timeframe. And of course, they had the door-mounted M-60 machine guns. They had an awful lot of problems with them with the bolts cracking and things. And we couldn't keep enough of those parts in to keep those going sometime. We had to actually shut choppers down from training on that because we didn't have enough guns functioning. Now I don't know, but I think I suspect now – I got a lot better background now than I had then -- that it's probably a heat-treat problem on locking lugs and things, but I don't really know that. But I suspect that's what it was. We did get to see, while we were there, and I don't remember how we got them, but a lot of the stuff that the VC were using. Some old Russian stuff, some homemade stuff that were no more than a glorified zip gun. They brought those in.

Q: Were you seeing French weapons coming in, too?

ELB: I don't remember French so much as just some AK-47's, some of the older Western stuff, some SKS stuff. No, I don't recall much of the French stuff. But basically that stuff was just brought in and we got to look at it. I think it probably eventually ended up in a museum there in Hawaii at probably the 25th Division Museum. I would guess that's where that stuff would have ended up, I would think. You know, I can remember just thinking at the time that if this is what these people are fighting with, this is just silly. You know, this is no big deal. And obviously, we all found out a lot different later on. But, you know, Hawaii was OK. I enjoyed TDY out of there to places while I was there. I'm not a beach person, that type of thing, but, you know, obviously you went to the beach while you were there and that type of thing. Met a few people. I got to work some with some civilians there. Like I say, I was on the Army inspection team, and the civilian equivalent of that did inspections. Their small arms guy had a heart attack, and I traveled around with him quite a bit on the island to some of the Nike sites, some of that stuff. Going in and inspecting weapons and stuff like that.

Q: Those weren't small arms.

ELB: Well, I didn't inspect that. I inspected small arms over there. They had small arms over there. Yeah, I agree.

Q: When did you end up going to Vietnam?

ELB: I went to Vietnam in ... I think I left Hawaii in about February or March of '66. We had gone over ... We had some people who went over in '65. Late '65, the First Brigade went over. And I went over then ... and again, and this is ... I've had some Vietnam vets who just almost call me a liar on this one ... I went to Vietnam by boat. Went on a troop ship, and we landed, and I think it was Cam Ranh Bay, but I don't remember. We anchored off-shore, went down over the side of the nets. The whole nine yards just like

your storming the beach. Got on the little boats, went in to the beach. Then they put us on an airplane, and we flew the rest of the way. They said that was very unusual. Like I say, I think it was Cam Ranh Bay but I don't ... I'm not sure. I just don't remember, but that was pretty interesting. 'Cause we did a lot of amphibious training when I was in Hawaii. But anyway, I flew to ... we flew into Tan Son Nhut, and at the time, they were in the process of building up the big Cu Chi base camp. And basically, what I did the whole ... most ... I won't say most of the time, but probably the first three months or so I was there, we shuttled trucks from the docks at Saigon to Tan Son Nhut and then on to Cu Chi in convoys. And you would help unload them at the docks. Basically, drive to Tan Son Nhut. You might spend a night or so there. Then you would form up a convoy and take it to Cu Chi, catch a chopper, go back, and do the same thing again. You might make, I would say, an average of probably one trip a day. I think it was around 60 miles. Sometimes you'd get in two, but then sometimes you'd skip days. They'd blow up bridges at night, that type of thing, where you couldn't get through. I paired up with another guy, good friend of mine who I've kept in touch with over the years from Colorado, and we'd basically be kind of a team. One drove and the other one rode shotgun. You'd be in some major, major convoys.

Q: Were you ever under attack in Vietnam?

ELB: Yeah, once in a while, not ... mostly, it was a mortar thing from a distance or rockets come in. I can remember a couple of times some vehicles getting hit, and I don't remember anything even really that close to us. It seemed like it was ahead or behind. You know, sometimes you'd have like, if you'd had a bridge blown up or something, you'd have to turn around and go back. They'd split the convoy up, but they kept it patrolled pretty good. During the day, you know. It was the typical thing. You know, we owned the day, and VC owned the night there, but... That's what I did a lot when I was there at first. Then we eventually go set up with our own. Got everything near. We worked out of our ordnance vans there. In Hawaii, we worked out of our vans when we went into the field, but in Vietnam we never had a shop and we worked out of our vans all the time. We didn't get a lot of stuff in. Most of the stuff, small arms there that needed repair, was junk. So we didn't do a lot. I did more working on helping other ... by then I was a platoon sergeant, or acting platoon sergeant, an E-5 kind of in an E-6 slot type of thing, so I got to go out ... We'd go out to firebases and that stuff and work on some artillery pieces, that type of thing. I would help out on that. I was also cross-trained. This was something I missed when I was in Hawaii. I was cross-trained on turret repair on tanks 'cause they wanted to promote me to an E-4 to time, and they didn't have a slot on small arms, so they cross-trained me on turret repair so I could jump into it if they had a slot, an E-4 slot for turret repair. So I jumped to that although I never did work it all that much. I did some.

Q: Did they have a lot of problems with the turrets turning because of the weather and the humidity?

ELB: Yeah, some of that. And we used to do quite a bit of routine maintenance on them. One of the things they had problems with the barrels corroding and things. Actually, the barrels on a tank come off fairly easily, and we would take them off, and clean them up, and re-lube and stuff, and put them back in, and that type of thing. Vietnam ... I get ... well, it's not a feeling I get, I know it's true ... Like I say, I was there in '66 and most of the people that I know were there later, and it was an entirely different war, I think. Like

I said, I was in an ordnance battalion and probably more of the people were professional soldiers, or I won't say professional, but were enlisted, and I just did not see all the things that I heard about later on with the drugs. I mean, yeah...

Q: Any racial problems at that time?

ELB: Nothing ... no, there weren't ... Boy, I tell you, our group was ... God, it had to be 75-80 percent Caucasian. There weren't too many blacks, or... No, I never really saw a problem. I had, uh... No. Like I say, you saw some guys with pot and things, but any hard drugs I never saw it. I just really didn't. Maybe it was there and I wasn't aware of it.

Q: Did you have much contact with the people there, the local people?

ELB: Occasionally. You know, you'd get into Saigon and that type of thing. You know, you don't speak the language, so it's hard. I didn't overly try. I mean we would go to... I can remember going into Tan Son Nhut there and some places just off base and eating in restaurants and things. That was quite enjoyable, but not a lot, no. I know on base, in one instance, we'd been there and one of the barbers they found out was VC. I think that was fairly common with a lot of the mess hall help. That type of thing.

Q: Were you wearing the jungle fatigues at that point?

ELB: Never had jungle fatigues on in my life.

Q: You were wearing stateside fatigues then?

ELB: Yeah. They just ... No, I'll take that back. We did have jungle fatigues. I'm mistaken. I'm thinking about camouflage. We never had any cammo. We did have... We had kind of a mix of the regular stateside fatigues and the jungle fatigues. We did get jungle boots, which were a big help. But I got mixed up on that with the cammo. We never had any camouflage stuff at all. We did... Even when we were on the base camp then, we carried a rifle with us 24-7. That type of thing. I don't know if that relaxed later on or not. From what I understand, that Cu Chi base camp where I was at ... because I was earlier and it was still being built up ... before I was over there, it was a golf course and everything else there. I can't state that for a fact, but I've heard that. Some things I've read.

Q: When you were there, you didn't know anything about the tunnels of Cu Chi?

ELB: Didn't know a thing about the tunnels until I read the book *The Tunnels of Cu Chi*. I don't know if you've ever read that or not.

Q: Yes.

ELB: But didn't know a thing about it. And we'd get a mortar attack. Didn't know where it was coming from. Now I know where it was coming from. But I didn't know it at the time. I really didn't. Like I say, I was out of there in late July or early August of '66. I wasn't there that long, really.

Q: Any problems with malaria or any type of tropical diseases – jungle rot, etc.?

ELB: Well, I think everybody had the jungle rot, that type of thing. I did get, if you read my thing, very sick over there. That was why I came back a little bit early when I did.

Q: Now, you want to talk about that?

ELB: Sure. I can remember it vividly. Waking up one morning, and I didn't have that long to go. I had like less than a month, I'm sure. And I had a catch in my ankle. I just felt funny. I don't know, like a pinch, a pop. I didn't think much of it. During the course of the day, it was swelling up, swelling up.

Q: It was just one ankle?

ELB: One ankle. The left ankle. But at night, man, I was taking a shower and I could just barely get back to the barracks. Next morning I had an ankle the size of a football. Went on sick call. They didn't know what to do. They medevaced me to Saigon. Got me down there. Checked me out. By now my left knee is ballooning up. Laid there a day. My right ankle starts. I had to laugh. I was finally diagnosed with what they call Reiter's Syndrome. That's a ... if you know what a syndrome is, it's a bunch of symptoms that come up that they've really never been able to pin it down that much. And eventually, I couldn't walk. So I left there, flew back to ... ended up at Valley Forge Army Hospital.

Q: I read in there when you flew back that was a first, right?

ELB: Yeah, absolutely. One of the most interesting things, we were on the ... I was on the very first flight that came back from Vietnam, directly back to the states. We flew the Polar route. We stopped in, I don't remember where. Japan, we refueled. We refueled in Alaska. Landed at Andrews Air Force Base. We didn't really know the significance of this, and I'm not even sure that we knew about it until we landed, and there was the press there. You know, it was a major news event. In fact, I was interviewed by Hugh Downs. I can remember that. We never made the air.

Q: How many were on board?

ELB: Not ... I'm guessing thirty or so, something like that. Some of them pretty bad. One guy died, I think, on the way over. I sent an article. That maybe said how many was on it.

Q: I don't remember from reading it.

ELB: I don't remember it myself. That's why I hesitate to say here. I might be way off on what I'm telling. I'm guessing thirty. It was a C-141 that they had hooked up. It had doctors.

Q: Twenty six.

ELB: Twenty six? OK, I wasn't far off on the thirty then. There was some guys who was pretty bad. We landed at Andrews. Spent the night there at Andrews Air Force Base. Or maybe one night. I was still ... I wasn't ambulatory at all. They took me off on a litter. I'm not sure, maybe I got in a wheelchair. Yeah, I had to of, because I remember going to the mess hall. And this would have been like August, and I can remember fresh tomatoes that were just... Probably the most greatest meal I ever had in my life were those fresh tomatoes. I can remember that, how they tasted. Oh, I still love them to this day. They were great. And ice cream. I had a lot of ice cream there. I can remember there was two of us they put on a ... like in a room by ourselves or on another floor or something. I can't remember exactly the situation, but I remember there was a Catholic priest come up, and I'm not Catholic, but just a great guy, and he spent like a whole evening with us

and just talked to us. That was great talking to him. I can remember that. I can remember what the guy looked like, but I can't remember his name. Like I said, I can't remember if it was the next day or the next day, and then they ... I flew to Fort Dix on a small plane. In fact, I was on a litter and I can remember laying in the aisle. I think I couldn't even sit up in a seat. It was one of the few times in life when I was just – I'm not particularly afraid of flying – but I just knew that plane was going to crash. I just ... and I don't know if it was being laying in the floor not being able to see or what. It was horrible. I can just remember, but when I landed, you know, I really...

Q: Did you roll off the stretcher and kiss the ground?

ELB: Yeah, something like that. And then we went by bus to Valley Forge. Got there, and I can remember we got to call home, and that was the first time I had talked to my parents in almost three years because, just, you didn't call back then, you know. I wrote a lot, and they came down maybe the next weekend. My entire family. My mom and dad, my brother and sister come down to see me. I can remember my brother was a Corpsman in Korea, you know, so he knew what he was getting into, so he went first, and then my parents and things come up. In fact, let me say something here about that. This is a very interesting thing. My brother was a Corpsman in Korea, was on the hospital ship the Haven, and in 19 – I'm not sure of the year – went up the Saigon River and got a bunch of the French out of there to bring them back. And they actually brought them back to France. I thought that was interesting. We were both in Vietnam at some point in time 10-12 years apart. That's kind of a sideline to this whole thing, but that was always very interesting to me. But anyway, my parents come and I can remember Valley Forge was a great place. They had housing there where they stayed. I don't know, they spent a night or two, I don't remember now. And then went back. And I got there ... I basically spent about four-and-a-half months there. I was probably there for two months, maybe, before I could leave, and I rode the train. I got ... no, I didn't, I'm lying. My sister and my mother come down and picked me up the first time and went back home. I grew up about probably 300 miles from there. We were really opposite ends of the state from Valley Forge, which is down by Philadelphia. And I went home with them, and I was home, I think the first time for about a month, and I can remember getting up the back of the steps ... my mom and dad had back steps going on. They had put in an enclosed porch. I can remember I was on crutches, put my crutches in front. I said I'm not using those again, and I didn't. And I was there a month, and the day that I came back to town, I went hunting. I hobbled up on a hill behind the house. And then I went back. I remember a good friend of mine I was from high school with took me back down. And then to find out I was getting around pretty good then.

Q: Now what were they doing for you?

ELB: Therapy, basically. That was about it. Some...

Q: Medication?

ELB: Not really. This whole thing... Well, what caused all this massive swelling and stuff was arthritis. And I'm 22 years old, and, you know, I was just eaten up with this stuff. And aspirin, basically, was back then about all they were giving you for it. There's been some things later on that helped with it.

Q: Has it ever reoccurred?

ELB: Yeah. That was in '66. I got married in 1971, and I'd been married about three months and I felt the stuff coming on again. And I spent about a month, better part of a month or two, laid up with it that time. That would have been '71 and I had another episode with it in '84 or '85, but each time it was less and less. I still have problems with it. I mean I'm having problems with the knee right now, but I have problems with arthritis. I ... but nothing that I can't overcome. You know, it's not that bad, really. I do anything I want to do. And anyway, then ... where were we at? ... basically, I was hanging around there with the therapy and this. By then, I'd bought a car and I was going home just about every weekend. I'd get a three-day pass every weekend. I was just biding my time until I got discharged.

Q: How would you rate your care while you were there?

ELB: I thought it was excellent. I really did. I can't say enough about Valley Forge. There's a guy I work with that was from one of the Cav units that was there about a year after me, and we oftentimes at lunch will talk about it and we both thought it was a ... it was a good facility. I have no complaints. He was there, like I say, after I was and I know when I was there the first floor was all that was used. The second floor wasn't. But when he was there, the whole place was filled up. But when he was ... there was a lot more troops in Vietnam, and that type of thing. But he and I talk about it. I have no complaints whatsoever about that. I really have no complaints about the service much at all. It was a positive experience for me. Did a lot of growing up. Got some direction to my life, and that type of thing.

Q: Something you forgot to mention, you got to kiss Julie Andrews?

ELB: [Laughs]. Oh, yeah. I did forget that. In fact, I saw her last night in a movie. I always think about that. Yeah, when I was in Hawaii, the movie "Hawaii," I don't know if any of you have seen it, was being filmed there. I don't know who arranged it. She come out to do a tour of the base and everything. We were on firing ranges with our ordnance vans, and they actually come up onto one of them, and she gave me a peck on the cheek.

Q: How'd she pick you?

ELB: I don't know. I probably wasn't the only one. [Laughs]. She's always been my favorite movie actress, I'll tell you that much. I'd forgotten about that. I'm glad you brought that up. I'm a little nervous here.

Q: That's okay. Now you were discharged from Valley Forge?

ELB: Right. My ... I was supposed to have gotten out in August, and I was on a medical hold until December, so I was held over there three months, or whatever it was when I got out.

Q: Did you happen to see any USO shows while you were over there?

ELB: Yeah.

Q: You kissed Julie Andrews...

ELB: Yeah, we saw ... not a Bob Hope one. I did see one, but it was so far away I don't remember who it was. I can't remember who it was. I can ... I've got pictures of it too, but I don't remember who it was.

Q: Was it Martha Ray?

ELB: It wasn't Martha Ray. I'm wanting to say it was Ann-Margaret, but that may be not true. I don't know. That was a long time ago. I can remember one of the things that made a big impression on me, and I'm very active in the [American] Legion right now, and one of the reasons is that when we got back to Valley Forge, the Legion was great down there. And they used to come in and have dances and, you know, just bring food in and stuff. 'Cause I can remember talking especially, I don't remember the Post, but it was a little Post from quite a ways away, and they had so many of their members was in World War 2 and this was their way of giving back. That was ... they did a great job there.

Q: Did you ever use the G.I. Bill?

ELB: Yes. I went ... I got home and I went to ... I attended the University of Pittsburgh for a while, and I eventually went to a place in Pittsburgh called the Triangle School of Drafting, and I have an Associate's Degree in Mechanical Drafting. And I've pretty much stayed in the field my whole life. Did that, and I've used it for some, you know, other classes and stuff beyond that, but that's the degree I have.

Q: And obviously you're active in veterans groups?

ELB: I'm very active in the Legion. I belong to VFW. I'm not active in it. I'm still active in the Legion. I've been a Post Adjutant for a long time. I've been on the Board of Directors for 15 years. I'm a past County Commander of the American Legion, Ontario County. Been on the Charities Committee. I'm in our Color Guard. That's the thing I do for fun. The other stuff is ... I like to say I do it for the good of the Legion. But I'll be the first to admit, I do that one for fun. It's a lot of fun, Color Guard.

Q: I think you alluded to one person. Have you been in contact with anyone you served with?

ELB: Yeah. Dwight Lessington's his name [*name spelling may not be correct*]. He's the only one I've maintained contact with over the years. He's in Colorado. A little place called Eads, Colorado. Works for the state. I haven't talked to him in a while. He's about ready to retire, but we've kept in touch over the years. I had another good friend in Ohio – Niles, Ohio. He got out of ... he was in Vietnam, got discharged from there, came to see me probably a year or so after I got home. Maybe a year-and-a-half. And then probably 15 years later, I was traveling through Ohio with my family. I was living in Tennessee at the time. We'd driven all night, stopped for breakfast. I said, "This is where this friend of mine is from, Mike Rushack." [*name spelling may not be correct*]. Looked his name up in the phone book. I'll call him. Call him. Where you at? Told him, "I'll be there in five minutes." He lived around the corner. So he came, and we had a good visit. My wife thought it was too long. She was wanting to go. But that was nice seeing him. I got another real good friend I was in high school with. He was in Hawaii. I was in Hawaii with him, and he was there before me, and we ended up going to Vietnam on the same ship together. And kept in touch over there. And we were ... He was due to be discharged like a week or two before me, and at that time everyone got discharged in California. He was gonna wait, and we were gonna buy a car and drive cross-country coming back. I got sick and so that never happened. I kept in touch with him, very close touch with him, for

many, many years, but he's probably about ten years been moved to California, so we email one another now and I haven't seen him probably in about ten years. Like I say, we kind of grew up together and were in high school together, were good friends in high school, and maintained that friendship over the years. Other than that, I really haven't been in contact with anybody. I'm a member of the 25th Division Association, but I've never attended any reunion.

Q: Next question ... OK.

ELB: No, I never have. I know a friend of mine was 82nd Airborne, and I think he's gone to four this year. But I've just never really had the burning desire to do it. Maybe someday.

Q: Ever have the desire to return to Vietnam?

ELB: Maybe. Yeah. I probably would at some point in time, if I had the chance. I know ... a guy I know very well, he used to be at the Wayne County Sheriff's Office, Col. Tom Ferguson, he got back about three years ago. He took his son and went over. I talked to him quite a bit about it. He thoroughly enjoyed it. He went back, I guess, to Cu Chi, and now all the tunnels are quite a tourist thing, and things there where they go through it. I think he had some pictures of that, in fact. I don't know that I ever will, but if my wife was interested in it, I might. To go alone, I don't think so.

Q: Do you ever read much, or watch any movies, on Vietnam?

ELB: I read quite a bit. The movies I've tried to watch, I just, I can't. I just ... they don't bother me, they're B.S. from what I've seen, you know. I don't care for them.

Q: I know you were out when the big anti-war movement happened. How did you feel about it, being a veteran and being back?

ELB: That was a tough time. I did probably more drinking then than I should have. I don't think it ever really got that out of hand, but I did my fair share. And it was tough. I was going to school at the time. I can remember freshman year English Composition. What do I know? I just got out of the service, been to war, write about this. They laughed at me. I was probably 23 at the time. These kids are 18. They laughed at me. Yeah, I kind of, for the next, boy, virtually 20 years, sort of crawled in a shell, and I never admitted I was in Vietnam or the service or anything else. Just didn't do it, you know. If it come up, I didn't hide the fact, but I certainly didn't volunteer it, let's put it that way. And I think that was the case in a lot of people. You know, I like to think of myself as probably more of an average person that was in the service. You know, I think so much of the movies with the, you know, baby killers, everybody that was there was a drug addict, and this type of thing, is ... and I don't think that's the case. I mean, those things happened, but I think it's just overblown so much that I don't... And this is another one of my pet peeves. Being in a veterans group, meeting a lot of veterans, 90 percent of the guys I know that were in Vietnam were either tunnel rats, helicopter pilots, snipers... [Laughs]. Nobody was a clerk-typist, nobody drove a truck. You know, that's... it is what it is. I'm sure you guys must see a tremendous amount of that stuff.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

ELB: Well, it gave me, like I said before, it gave me some direction. Settled me down a lot. I didn't know what I wanted to do before. Probably was another classic example of:

three years and something I spent in the service, how smart my dad got. You know, in that time frame. I don't know when I got out I knew exactly what I wanted to do, but I knew a lot of things I didn't want to do. I look back on it as part of my education. I highly recommend it. To this day, I highly recommend it to anybody. I think it's a tremendous educational thing. I was a little disappointed my son didn't go in. Talked about it, never did. It was OK that he didn't. I in some ways wish that he had. I've always admired like the World War 2 guys and that. Did before and still do. My father-in-law was a World War 2 vet, very decorated World War 2 vet. And that type of thing. My family's always been very supportive of the Legion activities and that type of thing. My whole family's tuned in to the veterans' issues pretty good. My kids are both active in the Legion – my daughter in the Legion Auxiliary and my son in the Sons of the Legion, and that type of thing.

Q: Well, thank you very much for your interview.

ELB: Well, thank you for putting up with me.